



Local Food and Farm Council

Check-in Meeting Minutes

January 9, 2026

Location		Present	Absent	Start Time	End Time	Recorder
via Zoom Video Conferencing/*-		10	12	9:06 a.m.	9:58 a.m.	Jacquette Maynard
This Council is composed of the following agencies, farmers, and restaurateurs:	University of the Virgin Islands (UVI)	Department of Agriculture (VIDA)		Department of Education (VIDE)	Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR)	Economic Development Authority (USVI EDA)
	Farmer (TBA)	Farmer (TBA)		Farmer (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)	Restaurateur (TBA)
Present:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., – Commissioner (VIDA) • DPNR Designee: Dr. Nicole F. Angeli – Director of Fish and Wildlife • Member: Wayne L. Biggs, Jr., – Chief Executive Officer (EDA) • VIDE Designee: Ms. Cydney Meadows – Territorial Director of Sustainability & Agricultural Education • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Royce Creque – Greenridge Guavaberry Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Dr. Nate Olive – Ridge to Reef Farm • Dr. Rick Nader – Vice President for Research and Economic Development (UVI) • Shanta Roberts – Director, Agriculture Business Center (AgBC) • Karen Jones - Interim State Director of Small Business Development 					
Absent:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-chair: Dr. Safiya George – President (UVI) • Co-chair Designee: Dr. Usman Adamu – Dean and Director of the School of Agriculture (UVI) • Member: Jean-Pierre L. Oriol – Commissioner (DPNR) • Member: Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington – Commissioner, VI Department of Education • VIDE Designee: Mr. Harith Wickrema – President of Island Green Living • VIDE Designee: Dr. Renee Charleswell – Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction • DPNR Designee: Dr. Sennai Habtes – Bureau Chief, Fisheries • Honorary Farmer Member: Mr. Edmon Titre – New Breed Farm • Honorary Farmer Member: Ms. Abeba Sellassie – Ityopia Rootz Farm • Honorary Fisher Member: Mr. Winston Ledee • Honorary Fisher Member Ms. Mavel Maldonado • Local Food and Farm Coordinator: Ms. Sommer Sibilly-Brown – VI Good Food Coalition Program 					

I. CALL TO ORDER AND OPENING REMARKS

- The check-in meeting of the Virgin Islands Local Food and Farm Council was called to order at 9:06 a.m. by Dr. Louis Petersen, Co-Chair, after confirmation that a quorum was present.
- Dr. Petersen welcomed members to the Council’s first meeting of 2026, extended New Year’s greetings, and noted that the meeting was intended to serve as a strategic check-in and would be kept to approximately one hour.

II. Status Report on Participating in the Bordeaux Farmers Rastafari Agriculture & Cultural Vegan Food Fair

The first item of business concerned Council participation in the Rastafari Board of Farmers Agricultural and Cultural Vegan Food Fair scheduled for January 16–17, 2026. Ms. Maynard reported that only four individuals had registered to assist with staffing the Council’s table. Those who had indicated availability were only able to attend for limited periods, making it challenging to ensure consistent coverage throughout the event.

Ms. Maynard further explained that the Events and Activities Subcommittee had discussed the matter and expressed concern that the Council would not be able to adequately staff a table for both days of the event. While promotional materials, including informational cards, are being developed, the primary issue remains staffing capacity rather than materials.

- Dr. Petersen observed that, under these circumstances, it would not be prudent to host a Council table with significant gaps in coverage.

- Director Biggs suggested that the Council instead make its informational materials available at partner tables during the fair.

The discussion turned to possible partner organizations, including the Cooperative Extension Service, the Small Business Development Center, and the University of the Virgin Islands.

Later in the meeting, Director Roberts confirmed that she would be present at the fair and was willing to distribute Council materials at her table, space permitting.

Accordingly, with this assurance and no objections raised, the Council reached consensus that it would not host a dedicated table at this event and would instead distribute its materials through partner organizations.

III. TAP Academy Update – Dr. Rick Nader

Dr. Nader explained that the initiative is being developed collaboratively with the TAP Fellows, Director Roberts, and several partner organizations, including the Good Food Coalition.

Dr. Nader outlined a three-part virtual workshop series designed to build grant and funding readiness in the agricultural community. The first session will provide an overview of grants, contracts, and loans, including where funding originates and how these tools align with the priorities of the Territorial Agricultural Plan. The second session will focus specifically on grant writing, including proposal structure and key components of competitive submissions. The third session, to be led by Director Roberts, will focus on loans and other non-grant funding tools, including business planning and market assessments.

In addition to the virtual sessions, Dr. Nader described plans for a future in-person grant writing “boot camp” that will provide hands-on technical assistance across multiple stations, including narrative development, budgeting, and compliance.

Ms. Maynard shared that community interest in the TAP Academy is increasing and that registration numbers have begun to rise, including participation from both Council members and members of the public. She noted that she has also received direct inquiries from individuals seeking more information.

Discussion:

- A substantive discussion followed regarding access to grant writing assistance and the ongoing challenge of matching fund requirements, which often prevent otherwise eligible farmers and organizations from pursuing funding opportunities. Dr. Olive emphasized that this remains a major structural barrier for many producers.
- Dr. Nader explained that matching requirements vary by program and funder and that there is currently no dedicated territorial pool of matching funds, though the concept is strategically important and may warrant future policy development.
- The Council also discussed the possibility of recording TAP Academy sessions to expand access, and this idea was generally supported pending coordination with presenters.

IV. Subcommittee Meeting Scheduling

Dr. Petersen began discussion on establishing a more regular and predictable meeting schedule for its subcommittees.

Ms. Maynard shared that the Events and Activities Subcommittee has been meeting regularly, while the Finance Subcommittee had previously agreed to meet on a quarterly basis. Other subcommittees, including Organic Agriculture and the Integrity/Local Label Subcommittee, have experienced scheduling difficulties and, in some cases, cancelled meetings due to lack of attendance.

Dr. Petersen proposed establishing a baseline quarterly schedule for all subcommittees, with the understanding that any committee could meet more frequently as needed. To reduce scheduling conflicts for members who serve on multiple subcommittees, Ms. Maynard suggested staggering meetings so that different subcommittees meet in different months within each quarter.

Discussion:

- The Council agreed that for the first quarter of 2026 the sequence would be as follows: Organic Agriculture in January, Integrity/Local Label in February, and Finance in March.
- With respect to the Integrity Subcommittee, Dr. Angeli recommended that its upcoming meeting be held in a hybrid or in-person format, noting that many members are based on St. Croix and that early, in-depth working sessions would be beneficial for shaping the committee’s work.
- The Council agreed in principle, with a preference for holding the meeting at the University of the Virgin Islands if feasible, and with final logistics to be coordinated by Ms. Maynard.

V. Funding Status and Legislative Follow-Up

Dr. Petersen provided an update on the status of FY2026 funding related to implementation of the Agricultural Plan. He reported that repeated inquiries to the Office of Senator Francis, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Post-Audit Division have produced inconsistent and troubling responses. In particular, Post-Audit reportedly has no record of Council-related appropriations, and OMB suggested that funding authority may have expired in FY2025, a position that appears inconsistent with the Agricultural Plan's intent for recurrent funding.

Discussion:

- Members expressed serious concern about the implications of these delays. It was confirmed that, to date, no entities associated with implementation of the Plan, including UVI, the Department of Agriculture, and the Economic Development Authority, have received FY2026 allocations.
- Dr. Nader and Director Biggs both confirmed that their respective institutions have not received funding.
- Dr. Olive and Dr. Creque spoke forcefully about the real-world impact of these delays on farmers and the agricultural sector, emphasizing the urgency of resolving the matter.
- Dr. Petersen committed to continuing engagement with Senator Francis's office and other relevant agencies and to escalating the matter further if necessary.

VII. Adjournment

- There being no further business, Dr. Petersen thanked the members for their participation and reaffirmed his commitment to continued advocacy on behalf of the Council and the agricultural community.
- The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:58 a.m.